

*This note is a contribution to an ongoing study of Catalina Island souvenir teaspoons with decorative images embossed, etched or engraved on their bowls. It should go without saying that our imperfect knowledge of the universe of Catalina souvenir teaspoons is constantly expanding as additional spoons come to our attention. All the interpretations and conclusions offered here should be considered provisional. They are the current "best approximation" based on the spoons, which have been observed to date. As additional spoons and new documentary evidence become available these ideas will be subject to refinement and revision.*  
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## Catalina souvenir teaspoons: Some observations on Avalon scenes engraved on teaspoon bowls

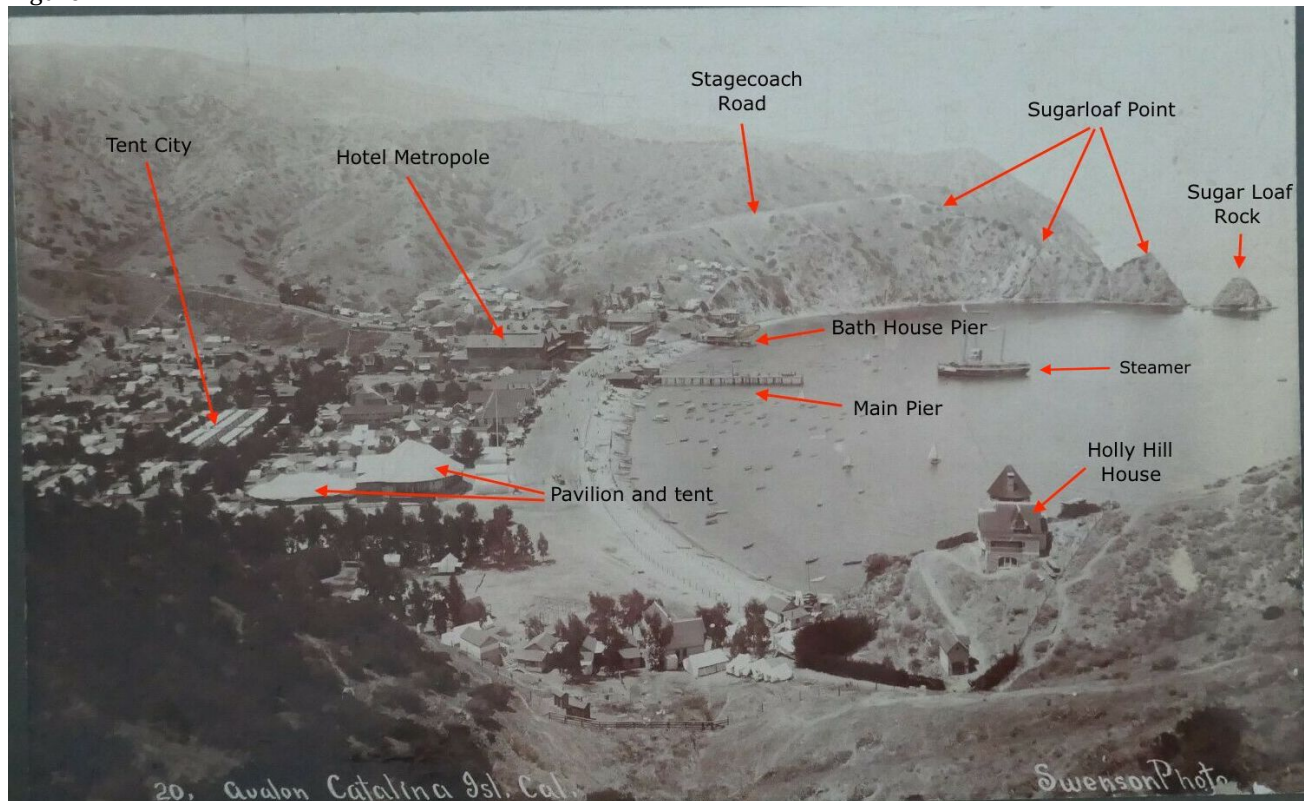
Harry V. Merrick

### Introduction

Decorating Catalina souvenir teaspoon bowls with hand engraved scenes of Avalon's popular attractions and landscape was a frequent practice for perhaps a decade and a half around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The most common image engraved on the bowls of such souvenirs was a panoramic view of Avalon Bay and Avalon town, viewed from the southeastern hills, looking northwestward across the bay toward Sugarloaf Point. Such panoramic views were regularly captured in early photographs beginning in the mid 1890s and on innumerable postcards beginning around 1900.

The early photo below, by Swenson Photo, ca. 1897-8, is a typical example of this view, and has been annotated to show the features and buildings that are often included in the engraved bowl scenes.

Figure 1:



#20 – Avalon Catalina Isl. Cal. - Swenson Photo, ca. 1897-98

About 90% of all Catalina Island sterling souvenir teaspoons with engraved bowl scenes display some rendering of this view of Avalon and the bay. Other engraved Avalon scenes more rarely encountered on teaspoons include, a close-up view of Sugarloaf Point and Rock (Fig. 2: C10), a view of Sugar Loaf Rock with a passing steamer, and a view of the Hotel Metropole.

### Teaspoons with engraved panoramic Avalon scenes

A survey of some 140 teaspoons exhibiting engraved panoramic views of Avalon reveals great variety in both the details depicted in the scene and in the accompanying captions. The survey also reveals, not surprisingly, that in several cases a particular caption was regularly associated with a group of very similar looking engravings. No doubt these groups of similar engraved scenes were the product of single engravers or small groups of engravers using the same design template, and in some way must reflect the interests, activities and choices made by the jewelers and curio dealers retailing these spoons on Catalina Island.

#### Captions

A wide variety of captions accompany the engravings. To date, 17 different captions have been observed on these bowls (Table 1 below). Typically these captions include some combination of the words and names “Santa”, “Catalina”, “Island”, “Cal.”, “Bay”, “Avalon”, “Harbor”, and “Los Angeles”, in full or abbreviated form.

Table 1: Observed captions on engraved bowls with Avalon panorama scenes

#1	“Catalina Isl Cal.” – 4 punctuation variants
#2	“Catalina Island. Cal.” (also the Fessenden & Co. and Paye & Baker embossed caption)
#3	“Catalina Island” and “Catalina Isld.”
#4	“Catalina Cal.”
#5	“Catalina Is. Bay” (order varies) and “Catalina Bay.”
#6	“Avalon Catalina Island” (order & placement varies)
#7	“Avalon Bay Catalina Island” (also the J. Mayer & Bros. embossed caption)
#8	“Avalon Santa Catalina” with some ending with “Isd.”
#9	“Avalon, Santa Catalina Island” (also the Shepard Mfg. Co. embossed caption)
#10	“Avalon Catalina Cal.”
#11	“Santa Catalina” and “Santa Catalina. Cal.”
#12	“Harbor, Catalina Is. Los Angeles Cal”
#13	“Catalina Los Angeles”
#14*	“Catalina Is Avalon” (only on a demitasse)*
#15	“Avalon Catalina”
#16	“Santa Catalina Island”
#17	“Los Angeles Catalina Is.”

*(In the following discussion the numbers of the captions and their varieties are presented in an abbreviated form, for example Caption 1, Variety 1a will appear as C1-V1a. Examples of these captions and their associated engravings are found in Figure 2, at the end of this note.)*

For as yet undetermined reasons, several captions, including “Catalina Isl Cal.” (C1), “Catalina Cal.” (C4) and “Avalon Santa Catalina” (C8), became very popular. “Catalina Isl Cal.”, the most frequently occurring

caption, had a very long run of popularity and use. The C4 and C8 captions, while also popular, appear less frequently, and have much more restricted periods of use.

While retail jewelers and curio dealers occasionally commissioned a spoon's primary manufacturer to provide the decorative engraving on the bowls, in the instance of Catalina souvenir spoons, it appears almost all of the Avalon scene engravings were, very likely, executed by local jewelers/engravers in southern California or in Avalon. The evidence for this view is twofold. First, is the observation that in several cases (C1-V1a, C1-V5a, C1-V5b, C8) the same caption and near identical engravings appear on spoons from multiple manufacturers. The second observation is that just three of the least frequently occurring captions, C2, C7 and C9, actually match any captions that appear on manufacturer produced embossed Avalon scene bowls. And of those, only the C7-V1 engravings happen to be exclusively found on spoons by J. Mayer & Bros., the manufacturer using that particular embossed bowl caption (Merrick 2022). The C7-V1 group of engravings is only strong case that any primary spoon manufacturer may have also provided the bowl engravings.

### Engraved Avalon scenes

The views of Avalon displayed on the engraved bowls vary tremendously. A sample of some of these scenes and captions is illustrated in Figure 2. Some scenes are very realistic, displaying many features and others are quite impressionistic, displaying only a few simply executed, but readily recognizable, features of Avalon and the bay. Some engraved scenes, including some of the potentially earliest ones, display very wide-angle views of Avalon, similar to the Swenson photo above (see Fig. 2: C5-V2 and C11 examples). However, the scenes associated with most captions usually focus narrowly on just the Avalon shorefront and the bay, and often frame the scene with two hillside ridges or vegetation in the foreground.

In surveying the variety of scenes and the variety of techniques and particular styles used to create the landscape and features like boats, buildings, vegetation, not to mention the variation in captions and their lettering style, it is apparent that dozens of engravers were responsible for creating these miniature scenes of Avalon. While the names of the engravers who created these scenes are unknown to us today, and they were probably equally anonymous to the public back then, in a few cases we can attribute particular groups of engravings to an individual engraver, or to a small group of engravers (a "School"). This is possible due to the idiosyncratic features shared by these sets of engravings. Three clusters of captions and engravings immediately stand out as products of such "schools".

"School of Engraver A"	C1-V1a, C13
"School of Engraver C"	C1-V5a & b, C4, C10, C16-V2)
"School of Engraver K"	C8

It is not unreasonable to imagine that the products of these different engraving "schools" may have been associated with particular, perhaps competing, jewelers or curio retailers in Avalon at various points in time. Moreover, evidence suggests that popular captions, such as, "Catalina Isl. Cal.", could be used by engravers of multiple schools, either concurrently or sequentially.

Practically speaking, determining the age of any particular engraved scene on a spoon is often very difficult, if not impossible. However, there are a few avenues that may be investigated. Obviously, the date when the spoon was designed or patented, if known, provides a *terminus post quem* date for the engraving. Features of the engraved scene itself may also provide clues about its maximum age. For example, the appearance of the Pacific Wireless Telegraph tower on the ridge of Sugarloaf Point in Avalon scene bowl engravings indicates the engraving is post mid 1902 (C1-V1 and some C1-V3). Similarly, any engraved view of Sugarloaf Point, which shows two separate prominent pinnacles, ("Big" and "Little" Sugar Loaf Rocks) indicates the engraving is no earlier than 1906 (C1-V1a, C6-V2 and C8). Finally there are the rare cases where the spoons have monogrammed dates, which, if we trust the contemporaneity of the engraving and the monogrammed date, provide us with the minimum age for the bowl engraving. Among the some 140 engraved bowls surveyed, dates were observed on eight spoons. These dates ranged between "1900" and "Sept, 1913".

## A provisional chronology of engraved Avalon scene bowls

Using the various lines of evidence outlined above, a rough chronology of engraved Avalon scene bowls is beginning to emerge. This is a current best approximation, which will, no doubt, undergo considerable revision and refinement as additional spoons and information become available.

**Pre 1900** spoons with engraved Avalon scenes are very problematic. Possible candidates are those C4 engravings whose captions exhibit distinctive elongated serifs on the “C”s, which form underlines beneath “Catalina Cal”. These very distinctive engravings are characterized by an unusually detailed view of Sugar Loaf Point and oddly canted roofs on buildings. These examples are all found on a variety of Gorham pattern spoons, the most recent of which is no earlier than 1898. As the style of these engravings and lettering does not look at all similar to the typical Gorham factory executed engravings reported by C. McGlothlin (2017), we may be fairly confident these were produced by an engraver, “Engraver C”, working directly for or with a Catalina based retailer.

**By 1900** there is a Howard Sterling Co. spoon with a simple sketch-like engraved Avalon scene, based on an early photograph similar to the Swenson #20 photo. It has a C11-V2 caption and a “1900” monogrammed date (see Fig. 2, C11-V2). A somewhat similar engraving on a Simmons & Paye spoon (see Fig. 2, C5-V2), if engraved while that firm was in business, could also date to ca. 1900. Around this same time subtle changes occur in the C4 engravings. These changes are also mirrored in the Caption 1, Variety 5 (C1-V5a & b) “School of Engraver C” style engravings which now appear for the first time. These C1-V5 engravings appear on spoons from several different manufacturers, and some of these spoons were designed no earlier than 1900-1901, or perhaps even a bit later.

**By 1903** there is a monogram dated spoon with a C1-V4 style engraving which exhibits a odd combination of the style and features of the earlier “School of Engraver C” engravings with some features, particularly of Sugarloaf Point, which presage later “School of Engraver A” style engravings (see Fig. 2, C1-V4). Competition with mass-produced embossed bowls has definitely begun with Paye & Baker’s “engraving-like” Avalon scene bowl design documented by mid 1903.

**By mid 1905** it is possible that C7-V1 style engravings may have appeared on specially designed J. Mayer & Bros. “Tuna” spoons featuring a series of Catalina landmarks and attractions. The depiction of the newly renovated Pilgrim Club building, completed in early 1905, provides a *terminus post quem*.

**By early 1906** the commonly encountered “School of Engraver A” (C1-V1a) engravings have made their first appearance, as might a C13 caption spoon also displaying a typical C1-V1a engraving. Monogrammed dated spoons with C1-V1a style engravings display dates of “Mar 13-06”, “1907” and “1912”. These engravings appear on spoons made by eight different manufacturers and also appear on specifically designed Catalina themed souvenir spoons made by Wallace and Watson. Examples of C6 and C8 style engravings and captions also appear around 1906-07, clearly indicated by the depiction of the prominent “Big Sugarloaf” pinnacle, created by the blasting through Sugarloaf Point to create the road to Descanso Canyon.

**By ca. 1915** the era of production of hand engraved Avalon scene bowls is likely over. The latest confidently dated Avalon scene engraved bowl encountered thus far is an especially refined and well-crafted example of a general C1-V1 style engraving which has a date of “Sept, 1913”. Changing tastes in souvenir spoons, engraving labor costs and competition with spoons with cheaper mass-produced embossed Avalon scene bowl scenes were undoubtedly factors in their disappearance.

## References:

McGlothlin, C.A. 2017. *Gorham Spoons: Sterling Souvenirs from a Bygone Era*. Rock Springs Press.

Merrick, H.V. 2022. Notes on embossed (die-struck) bowl designs by manufacturers (4/19/22). Posted on *Islapedia*. [https://www.islapedia.com/images/c/cc/Notes\\_on\\_embossed\\_bowls\\_4-15-22\\_w\\_demi\\_revision.pdf](https://www.islapedia.com/images/c/cc/Notes_on_embossed_bowls_4-15-22_w_demi_revision.pdf)



Figure 2: A sample of captions and their associated engraved Avalon scenes

Caption 1, Variety 1a - "Catalina Isl Cal." (C1-V1a)



on Watson #337 - nautical themes

Caption 1, Variety 4 - "Catalina Isl. Cal." (C1-V4)



on Coddling Bros. & Heilborn - figural fish - mono "1903"

Caption 1, Variety 2 - "Catalina Isl. Cal." (C1-V2)



on Watson #311 - figural fish

Caption 1, Variety 5a - "Catalina Isl. Cal" (C1-V5a)



on Watson #311 - figural fish - not marked

Caption 1, Variety 3 - "Catalina Isl. Cal." (C1-V3)



on Watson #311 - figural fish

Caption 1, Variety 5b - "Catalina Isl. Cal." C1-V5b)



on E.L. Deacon - mining themes with added seal terminal



Caption 4 - "Catalina Cal." (C4)



on Gorham Versailles pattern (woman and cherub)

Caption 6, Variety 2 - "Catalina Island Avalon" (C6-V2)



on Wallace Louvre pattern

Caption 5, Variety 1 - "Catalina Is. Bay" (C5-V1)



on L.D. Anderson marked Washington pattern  
"Los Angeles Cal" engraved on handle (post 1903)

Caption 7, Variety 1 - "Avalon Bay Catalina Island" (C7-V1)



on J. Mayer & Bros. - Catalina themes "Tuna"

Caption 5, Variety 2 - "Catalina Bay" (C5-V2)



on Simmons and Paye - Indian figural

Caption 8 - "Avalon Santa Catalina" (C8)



on Wallace Louvre pattern



Caption 10 - "Avalon Catalina Cal" (C10)



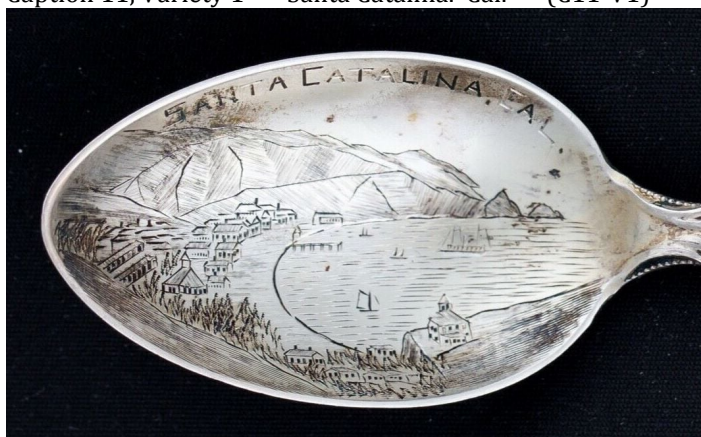
on Gorham Lancaster pattern (1897)

Caption 12 - "Harbor. Catalina Is. Los Angeles Cal" (C12)



on Wallace – pattern name not currently known

Caption 11, Variety 1 - "Santa Catalina. Cal." (C11-V1)



on Shepard #42 Poppy enamel

Caption 13 - "Catalina Los Angeles" (C13)



on Wallace Rose pattern (same scene/engraver as C1-V1a)

Caption 11, Var. 2 - "Santa Catalina Cal." (on handle) (C11-V2)



on Howard Sterling Co. Washington pattern (1895) tea – mono "1900"

Caption 16, Variety 2 - "Santa Catalina Island" (C16-V2)



on Watson #337 – nautical themes

Caption 17 - "Los Angeles Catalina Is." (C17)



on Watson California themes enamel